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On These Nets, Politics Is Local

By Linda Haugsted -- Multichannel News, 8/11/2003

When California State Sen. Jim Brulte (R-Rancho Cucamonga) wanted to hear what was going on in special Sunday budget discussions planned in the Assembly a few weeks ago, he knew just who to call.

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He dialed The California Channel to make sure the cable public-affairs network was covering the lower house's unusual work session, according to network president John Hancock.

"He watched it on the Web from his office, and later called to thank me," said Hancock, who added that the venture received calls from around the state to make sure there was coverage of the vital meeting.

The network undertook the Sunday broadcast because backers understand the service is for citizens who want to truly understand the way the process works, Hancock said.

It's the kind of coverage provided each workday by public-affairs networks across the country, including nets funded exclusively by cable, like the California Channel and Pennsylvania Cable Network, as well as services bankrolled by the legislators themselves with cable serving as an in-kind donor of all-important channel space.

Cable derives many benefits. It gains the goodwill of decision-makers such as the aforementioned Senate leaders. It attracts an admittedly small-but-growing viewership of devoted "government gadflies" that view the channels avidly.

And — because channel officials say direct-broadcast satellite companies have shown no interest in their regional fare — the industry gains relatively cheap, exclusive programming.

These networks also have access to something C-SPAN — the national icon — doesn't. Some statewide networks, such as TVW, the Washington state public-affairs network, and Michigan Government Television, televise arguments before the state Supreme Court.

So why aren't there 50 state public-affairs networks?

"We're not a flashy addition," said Paul Giguere, president and founder of Connecticut Network. "We're not talked about at trade shows and we don't bring in revenue."

Budget woes

Interestingly, the programming of most interest these days — coverage of efforts to trim state budget deficits — has also made it harder to launch new public-affairs networks.

The soft economy has caused budget deficits in 46 of 50 states — and crimped cable companies are seeking new revenue-generating products, rather than reserving valuable shelf space for nonprofit enterprises.

Still, new public-affairs networks are in their formative stages. They're also generating debate over how the services of the future will look from a business perspective.

In Illinois, public-affairs fans are already producing programming provided free to operators for use on local government channels.

So far, 350,000 cable homes in 21 communities can see the two-hour tapes each week, said Terry Martin, a C-SPAN veteran who's trying to get the Illinois Channel off the ground as an around-the-clock network.

Instead of soliciting for state funds — Illinois faces a \$5 billion budget hole — or financing from cable operators, Martin is organizing the channel as a privately funded venture. Seed money has come from local companies, notably Boeing Corp., which donated \$50,000.

The civic-minded Joyce Foundation underwrote a \$400,000, three-year study to determine interest and support for the venture. It also gave \$30,000 directly to the channel, Martin said.

The study, completed in 2000, indicated it would cost \$3.2 million a year to operate a network 24/7. But Martin said satellite costs have come down since then.

"If we could get halfway there, I think the state would provide further funding," he said.

Journalistic approach

A longtime state capitol reporter, Jeff Roberts, is taking the nonprofit route in Wisconsin, too. He's confident that Wisconsin Eye — under development for two years and with the stated support of Gov. Jim Doyle, legislative leaders and the state's chief judge — can launch in early 2004.

The network, which has solicited operating funds from foundations and other Wisconsin sources, has already attracted enough cash to begin construction of a studio across the street from the state capitol in Madison.

The state's two largest cable providers, Charter Communications Inc. and Time Warner Cable, have expressed support. Charter's headend will be the distribution point, and the MSO is helping install fiber-optic connections from the studio to the Statehouse, agencies and other sites.

Roberts admits the channel represents a big fundraising commitment. According to a consultant's report, Wisconsin Eye will require \$6 million in initial capitalization, plus \$1.5 million per year in operating expenses.

"We looked at other state models and decided to try, if we could, a journalistic approach, creating a credible independent source, instead of one whose message could be skewed by the party in power," Roberts said.

Non-profit shift

The nonprofit model is certainly a sea change for public-affairs networks.

Current networks are a mixture of those funded and distributed exclusively by cable, like The California Channel and the Pennsylvania Cable Network, and government-media partnerships, such as Michigan Government Television (MGTV).

"What works best is what works," said Danny Heck, founding president of TVW, who will retire this month. "Here, cable wouldn't provide us the funds. We wouldn't exist if we had had to be cable-only."

TVW activated its signal in 1995, despite controversy. The Statehouse supported the venture, but senators were sharply divided. Eventually, state officials approved an annual expenditure of \$2 million to televise the Legislature, state agencies and the Supreme Court.

Given the debate over cameras in courtrooms elsewhere, access in Washington was easy.

"I wish I could tell you I was exceedingly clever, but they just wanted it," said Heck.

Connecticut's CT-N has also thrived as a public-private partnership, though tough times are altering the funding model, Giguere said.

In the future, the channel's \$1.5 million annual budget could be tied to a gross-receipts tax levied on the state's cable operators. That tax might be expanded to the state's satellite providers — so, in future, DBS might help

subsidize the cable-only service.

Since 1999, CT-N has provided gavel-to-gavel coverage of the Legislature, agencies and the state Supreme Court. Filling out its 24/7 schedule: Events like the Discovery Health lecture series at the University of Connecticut and public policy lectures at Yale University.

Cable guys happy

Cable-funded networks like their business plans.

The California Channel launched in 1991, foundering at first. Operators were slow to back a channel controlled by a board of directors from non-cable companies, including then-Pacific Bell, The Walt Disney Co. and Bank of America. In 1993, non-industry board members resigned and operator uneasiness faded.

Today, the California network operates with a \$1.3 million budget, funded by per-subscriber contributions from the state's operators.

Operators contribute shelf space. And individual systems, such as the Los Angeles franchises of Comcast Corp. and Adelphia Communications Corp., produce 300 hours of original programming per year. The channel covers state government for 6½ hours a day on weekdays.

"There's a cooperative spirit here," said Hancock. "[Operators are committed] for the long haul."

Branching out

The Pennsylvania Cable Network launched with the support of home-grown cable companies in 1979, transmitting college telecourses via microwave.

Today, it's industry-funded annual budget is \$3.5 million, and the 24-hour net covers 85% of the state, president Brian Lockman said.

PCN takes public service beyond politics. It has exclusive rights to state high school sports championships. It has bureaus at the state's two largest newspapers. And in October, it will light up fiber connections that will enhance legislative coverage statewide.

Lockman said original programming has proved a hit, including weekend homework call-in shows for students, and a series that highlights local industries such as the maker of Slinky toys and Harley-Davidson Inc. PCN also produced an extensive oral history of local World War II veterans.

MGTV has taken on the challenge of building viewership by getting students interested in the channel. Executives saw the light four years ago, when they created a virtual field trip for students in a low-income area who couldn't afford to visit the capital, said executive director Bill Trevarthen.

After that, he said: "The students were walking on air. And if just two of them become better citizens, we'll be walking on air."

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MGTV

Michigan Government Television

TOP TEN FACTS ABOUT MGTV

1. "MGTV" is the acronym for Michigan Government Television, Inc., a non profit 501(c) 3 corporation. It is a public affairs initiative of Michigan's television industry. The board of directors is currently composed of cable television executives.
2. MGTV is completely independent of state government, financed by the cable industry through cable subscription fees.
3. MGTV is available statewide via satellite to local cable operators.
4. MGTV launched on July 15, 1996, and is currently on the air Monday through Friday from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. Eastern Time, 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. Central Time.
5. MGTV's mission is to provide the audience with live and taped coverage of all branches of Michigan government that is fair, accurate and balanced. MGTV does not edit its programming for content.
6. Programming includes House and Senate legislative session and committee meetings, commission and agency hearings from the executive branch of state government, live call-in programs, press conferences, speeches by major policy makers, live and taped oral arguments before Michigan's Supreme Court, and events from the state's colleges and universities.
7. Videotape copies of programs are available for a fee. Please contact MGTV at the address or phone number noted below.
8. As MGTV operates with a small staff, college internships are available.
9. MGTV is located in downtown Lansing, across the street from the Capitol building at the corner of Michigan and Capitol.
10. Please feel free to contact MGTV at:

MGTV
111 S. Capitol Ave.
4th Floor, Romney Bldg.
Lansing MI 48909
517/373-4250
517/335-7342 fax
email: mgtv@mgtv.org
website: www.mgtv.org

MGTV

Michigan Government Television

MGTV Programming Policies

MGTV's Mission

- To provide MGTV's audience with live and taped coverage of all branches of Michigan government;
- To provide elected or appointed officials and others who would influence public policy a direct conduit to the audience without filtering or otherwise distorting their points of view;
- To provide the audience; through the call-in programs, direct access to elected officials, other policy-makers and journalists on an occasional open basis;
- To provide students and educators with a working knowledge of the three branches of Michigan government;
- To employ production values that accurately convey the business of government without distracting from it; and to conduct all other aspects of its operations consistent with these principles.

Programming Parameters

Michigan Government Television (MGTV) will use its best efforts:

- To provide programming that is fair, accurate, balanced and without regard to partisanship or ideology. MGTV's coverage is intended to offer viewers access to government deliberations. MGTV's segments will be unedited;
- To provide programming which will be scheduled by the Executive Director in a manner which recognizes the role of timeliness in the value of information. Programming with content which does not lose value through immediacy may be delayed and replayed on a tape delayed basis;
- To provide programming and scheduling of telecasts which will reflect a variety of possible subject matter and deliberating bodies. Balance shall also reflect the importance of covering issues of interest to particular geographic areas;
- To keep statistics which insure a reasonable representation of the three branches of Michigan government;
- To provide programming and scheduling consistent with MGTV's mission with the understanding that MGTV's resources are limited. The MGTV Board delegates full authority to the Executive Director in making decisions.



MGTV

Michigan Government Television

THE MGTV STORY

Michigan Government Television (MGTV) is a public affairs initiative of Michigan's cable industry. Before MGTV was actually formed, the cable industry had been interested for a number of years in a cable network modeled on C-SPAN but covering state government. It had investigated the feasibility of such a network and commissioned a study on how it might be implemented and run.

At the same time that the cable industry was investigating a government cable TV network, Michigan's governor, John Engler, was also looking into the possibility of initiating a state government network. Governor Engler recognized that the citizens of Michigan could watch the federal government on C-SPAN and their local governments at work on the cable access channels but could not see any part of state government in action on television.

In an effort to correct this, Governor Engler decided to launch a distance learning network, one part of which would be a state government television network. The governor and his staff set about planning MGTV and putting together the necessary equipment to make it happen. Communications Systems Group (CSG), a Detroit-area firm, was hired to act as general contractor for the project. CSG designed and installed the impressive master control room in the Romney office building as well as the control rooms and cameras in the House and Senate chambers, in the Supreme Court chambers, and in the Governor's press room. In all, nearly \$1.5 million was spent on equipment for the project.

The cable television industry in Michigan, recognizing that the ideal model for MGTV would be the highly successful cable network C-SPAN, made a proposal to Governor Engler in December of 1995. The cable industry, which had acted as supporters and advisers throughout the project, offered to take MGTV over and reorganize it as a non-profit 501 (c) 3 corporation with a board of directors composed of cable industry executives. The network would be completely independent of state government, financed by the cable industry through cable subscription fees, and editorial control of programming would reside entirely in the hands of the corporation's executive director. The Governor's office turned the project over to the cable industry in December 1995.

MGTV was launched on July 15, 1996. Initial programming included House and Senate committees, commission meetings from within the executive branch including the state board of education, press conferences, speeches by major policy makers, and events from the state's university system.

When it began to air oral arguments from Michigan's Supreme Court in October of 1996, MGTV became the second television network in U.S. history to carry live coverage of a state's highest court. Live and tape-delayed coverage of the sessions of the Michigan House of Representatives and the Michigan Senate began in October of 1997. The coverage of House and Senate sessions and Supreme Court oral arguments remain the mainstays of MGTV's programming.

MGTV has been available statewide via satellite since February of 1997 and now reaches more than 1.5 million homes, schools, and businesses served by cable television. Programming hours are Monday through Friday from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m., Eastern Time and 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. Central Time.

ORDER OF BUSINESS FOR SESSION OF THE MICHIGAN HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

When watching House Session, you will hear the following words or phrases. These make up the outline of the Calendar (or agenda) for each day's session, though the order may be rearranged depending on the day's priorities.

- **INVOCATION**
Prayer given at the beginning of each day's session.
- **ROLL CALL**
Record of Representatives attending House session that day.
- **MOTIONS/COMMUNICATIONS**
Formal proposal related to the conduct of business in the House.
- **REPORTS OF STANDING COMMITTEES**
An official report from a House committee on a bill or resolution with a specific recommendation for action, including recommended amendments or substitutes. It also includes roll call votes and attendance information for that committee.
- **MESSAGES FROM THE SENATE**
Official communications from the Senate which are read into the official record. The most common message is related to bills.
- **THIRD READING OF BILLS**
The final reading of a bill before final passage, as required by the Constitution.
- **SECOND READING**
After a bill is reported out of committee, it is read a second time by number and title for the purpose of complying with the reading requirements of the Constitution. This procedure is specific to the House.
- **NOTICES**
Announcement of House and Joint committee meetings (including the date, time and place).
- **ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE CLERK OF PRINTING AND ENROLLMENT**
A bill must be printed and in the possession of each chamber for five days before it may be passed. In the case of a bill introduced in the Senate, the five days begin to run when the bill is received from the Senate.
- **MESSAGES FROM THE GOVERNOR**
Official communications from the Governor that are read into the official record and published in the House Journal. Generally, this includes messages concerning enrolled bills, proclamations and executive orders.
- **EXPLANATION OF "NO" VOTES**
A constitutional provision that permits any member to offer the reason for voting against any act or proceeding to be included in the House Journal as part of the record.
- **COMMUNICATIONS FROM STATE OFFICERS**
Official letters and documents sent to a legislative body from state officers. These are read in at the end of session each day and are printed in the House Journal.
- **INTRODUCTION OF BILLS**
The formal presentation of a proposal to the House after it has been turned in by the sponsor and assigned a bill number.
- **ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE CLERK**
The Clerk of the House shall announce each day the numbers of all bills and joint resolutions, both House and Senate, which have been printed or reproduced and placed upon the files of the members, and the number of House bills which have been enrolled and presented to the Governor.
- **ADJOURNMENT**
The conclusion of the day's session. The final adjournment, *sine die*, ends the year's session.

PLEASE NOTE: WHEN A SHORT PAUSE IN HOUSE SESSION IS NECESSARY, THE HOUSE MAY MOVE TO "RECESS AT THE CALL OF THE CHAIR" OR "RECESS UNTIL (a time specified)."

ORDER OF BUSINESS FOR SESSION OF THE MICHIGAN SENATE

When watching Senate Session, you will hear the following words or phrases. These make up the outline of the Calendar (or agenda) for each day's session, though the order may be rearranged depending on the day's priorities.

- **INVOCATION**
Prayer given at the beginning of each day's session.
- **ROLL CALL**
Record of Senators attending Senate session that day.
- **MOTIONS/COMMUNICATIONS**
Formal proposal related to the conduct of business in the Senate.
- **MESSAGES FROM THE GOVERNOR**
Official communications from the Governor that are read into the official record and published in the Senate Journal, the official printed record of all proceedings of the Senate. Generally, this includes messages concerning enrolled bills, proclamations and executive orders.
- **MESSAGES FROM THE HOUSE**
Official communications from the House which are read into the official record. The most common message is related to bills.
- **CONFERENCE REPORTS**
A report signed by the majority of the conferees of each chamber, consisting of agreements reconciling the different versions of a bill passed by the House and Senate. The same number of votes must approve a conference report in each chamber at it takes to pass the bill.
- **THIRD READING OF BILLS**
The final reading of a bill before final passage, as required by the Constitution.
- **GENERAL ORDERS**
An order of business under which the Senate meets as the Committee of the Whole to consider a bill or joint resolution. Generally this is a more informal meeting allowing unlimited debate. Votes are not recorded. This is used only in the Senate.
- **RESOLUTIONS**
A document expressing the will of the House or the Senate (or both, in the case of concurrent resolutions). Resolutions are used to urge state agencies or the Congress to take certain actions; to formally approve certain plans of governmental agencies; to conduct certain legislative business; or to establish study committees to examine issues. Some resolutions are also offered by members as an expression of congratulations, commemoration or tribute to an individual or group.
- **INTRODUCTION/REFERRAL**
The formal presentation of a proposal to the Senate after it has been turned in by the sponsor and assigned a bill number. As required by the Constitution, this is the first reading of the bill. The bill is then sent, or referred, to a Senate committee.
- **STATEMENTS**
Statements on topics, issues or items not properly before the Senate shall be limited to five minutes orally or, if submitted in writing, shall be no greater than 1000 words, except an oral dissent statement shall not be limited in length. This is used only in the Senate.
- **COMMITTEE REPORTS**
An official report from a Senate committee on a bill or resolution with a specific recommendation for action, including recommended amendments or substitutes. It also includes roll call votes and attendance information for that committee.
- **ADJOURNMENT**
The conclusion of the day's session. The final adjournment, *sine die*, ends the year's session.

PLEASE NOTE: WHEN A SHORT PAUSE IN SENATE SESSION IS NECESSARY, THE SENATE MAY MOVE TO "RECESS AT THE CALL OF THE CHAIR" OR "RECESS UNTIL (a time specified)."

ORDER OF BUSINESS FOR ORAL ARGUMENTS BEFORE THE MICHIGAN SUPREME COURT

When watching the oral arguments, you will hear the following words or phrases. These make up the outline of the court calendar (or agenda) for each day's session. For more information, please refer to the website links listed below.

- The Crier bangs the gavel to call the Court into session.
- The Justices file into the courtroom in the order in which they are seated.
- The Chief Justice calls each case to be heard.
- The attorney for the appellant presents his/her argument for initiating the appeal.
- The Justices may ask questions of that attorney at that time.
- The attorney for the appellee' presents her/his argument.
- The Justices may ask questions of that attorney at that time.
- The attorney for the appellant may then use time for a rebuttal, if they so requested and had reserved time during their initial oral argument.
- If several cases have been argued together due to similar legal issues, the attorney for each appellant and each appellee' is allocated approximately fifteen minutes for their argument.

EXPLANATION OF TERMS USED IN THE ORDER OF BUSINESS FOR ORAL ARGUMENTS

- Appellant A person who initiates, or starts, an appeal from one court to another.
- Appellee' The party in a lawsuit against whom an appeal has been taken.
- Chief Justice The highest judicial officer of the State of Michigan. Chosen chief justice by the other members of the Supreme Court.
- Crier The person who calls the court into session and announces the end of the session. Crier also serves as timekeeper and records official actions taken by the Court.
- Justice A title given to judges who sit on the "court of last resort", e.g. The Michigan Supreme Court.
- Rebuttal To answer or explain, to disprove evidence produced by the other party.

RELATED WEBSITES

<http://courts.michigan.gov/>
www.michbar.org

The Michigan Supreme Court is in the process of updating this site.
The State Bar of Michigan maintains this site and is constantly adding new information.

MGTV

Suggested Activities

For Government and Social Studies Class

Explore the MGTV Website

Students can learn more about how to use the internet as a research and learning tool and get an introduction to how their state government works by visiting the MGTV website. Our website address is www.mgtv.org.

Besides our weekly schedule, the website offers information on MGTV's programming policies and the history of MGTV. There is also a special section of the website devoted to educational resources, and there are links to other websites that offer more information on Michigan's state government. Go to the website and click on "Related Links."

Learn How the Michigan Senate and House of Representatives Work

Both our website and our printed materials offer an "Order of Business" for the House and Senate. These define the terms used as these bodies go about the business of making laws.

Students can use the Orders of Business as a guide when watching the House or Senate live on MGTV (check our schedule on the MGTV website for coverage of the House and Senate.)

To make it easier to teach how the House and Senate work, we offer a complete House and a complete Senate session in the archive of "video-streamed" programming on our website, www.mgtv.org. When you reach the website, click on "Video Stream." Because you can download this programming at will, you can use a portion of it each day for several days to teach how session works.

Also on the front page of our website, click "Related Links" for connections to websites that offer more complete glossaries of terms used by the House and Senate and that give more information on the legislative process.

Learn How the Michigan Supreme Court Works

Both our website and our printed materials offer an order of business and a glossary of terms for "oral arguments" before the Michigan Supreme Court. Students can use these as a guide when watching Supreme Court oral arguments when they are aired on Michigan Government Television. Check our website, www.mgtv.org for our programming schedule.

Because oral arguments occur only three days a month from October to April or May each year, it may be easier to use the example of an oral argument available through video streaming on our website. Go to the website using the address above, then click on "Video Stream."

Under related links, you will find a link to the website of the Michigan Supreme Court, which offers much information on the court.

Want to Participate in an MGTV Program?

MGTV does live programs with state government leaders and often involves government and social studies classes in these shows by telephone or, when available, by compressed video.

If you are interested in participating, please contact us, and we will add your name to our list of interested schools.

LINKS TO STATE OF MICHIGAN GOVERNMENT SITES

- **Michigan Legislature** www.michiganlegislature.org
Provides detailed information about the following:
Michigan Compiled Laws
Introduced legislation by number, subject or sponsor
House & Senate committee schedules, calendars and journals
How a bill becomes a law
A citizen's guide to state government
Glossary of legislative terms
- **Michigan House** www.house.state.mi.us
Provides detailed information about the following:
How to locate your legislator
House committees, leadership and general information
- **Michigan Senate** www.senate.state.mi.us
Provides detailed information about the following:
Master list of Senators and contact information
Senate leadership, committees and caucuses
- **Supreme Court** <http://courts.michigan.gov>
Provides information about the following:
The Supreme Court
Court of Appeals
Trial Courts
Recent decisions
Judicial Education
- **State of Michigan** <http://www.michigan.gov>
Provides detailed information about the following:
How to contact the Governor, Lt. Governor, U.S. Congress
Executive Branch
- **Library of Michigan** www.michigan.gov/hal
Provides detailed information about the following:
ANSWER (library catalog)
Genealogy resources
State law library
State and federal government information
General library services